



Fast Facts

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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BABYCAL CAMPAIGN

What is BabyCal?

BabyCal is a statewide public awareness and education campaign aimed at decreasing the incidence of low birthweight and infant mortality. BabyCal focuses on educating women and their families about the importance of prenatal care, practicing healthy behaviors during pregnancy, and the availability of state programs that can help pay for prenatal care services. BabyCal, administered by the Department of Health Services, was launched in 1991.

What are BabyCal's Key Messages?

The key messages of the BabyCal Campaign are: 1) get early and ongoing prenatal care; 2) practice healthy behaviors throughout pregnancy (no smoking, drinking, or drugs); and 3) the state has programs that can help expectant mothers.

Whom Does BabyCal Target?

BabyCal is designed to target high-risk women throughout the state of California, including African-American women, younger women, and low-income women of all ethnicities.

In Phase V of the BabyCal Campaign, a more intensive effort is underway to reach targeted women with increased emphasis on the role of the father and other influencers during a woman's pregnancy.

What is Low Birthweight?

Low birthweight (less than 5.5 lbs.) is the factor most associated with infant mortality. Low birthweight babies are 40 times more likely to die in their first year than healthy babies. Low birthweight babies who survive are more vulnerable to serious health and developmental problems such as blindness, deafness, mental retardation, and learning disabilities. Key factors in low birthweight include a lack of or inadequate prenatal care and the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs during pregnancy.

Why Do We Need BabyCal?

Conservative estimates show that for every dollar spent on prenatal care, at least \$3 is saved in neonatal care costs. Care for low birthweight babies in neonatal intensive care units can cost up to \$3,000 per day.

Considering that the state spends more than \$300 million annually in Medi-Cal costs for neonatal intensive care, efforts to educate expectant women about the importance of prenatal care and practicing a healthy lifestyle are well worth the investment.

How Does BabyCal Work?

Through social marketing, including advertising, community outreach, public relations, sponsorships, and a toll-free information line, the California Department of Health Services has demonstrated that large numbers of women can be reached and motivated to seek early and ongoing prenatal care and obtain information about state programs that can assist them, such as Medi-Cal and Access for Infants and Mothers (AIM).

Advertising: Extensive research is conducted in developing the BabyCal Campaign advertising, including using focus groups composed of pregnant women of various ages and ethnicities. Television advertising is broadcast in English and Spanish, and radio ads in Spanish. Asian print media regularly feature the BabyCal messages in targeted communities.

Community Outreach: In addition to advertising, BabyCal's messages are delivered to pregnant women through a statewide network of community-based organizations (CBOs). BabyCal brochures and posters are provided in English, Spanish, and four Asian languages to assist the CBOs in reaching target women. The network currently includes more than 500 CBOs bringing BabyCal's vital messages to the target population.

Sponsorship: BabyCal also works with private industry and partner agencies to gain support in delivering vital prenatal care messages to the public. Corporate sponsors have included 99 Cents Only Stores, Babies "R" Us, Baby Talk Magazine, Bay Area Rapid Transit, Beech Nut Corporation, the California Department of Motor Vehicles, General Mills, Eastman Kodak, Latina Magazine, Longs Drugs, Mattel, McDonald's, Raley's and Bel Air, The Vons Companies Inc., and the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks and Sacramento Monarchs.

Public Relations: BabyCal's public relations program focuses on hosting special events in communities throughout the state to inform the public and news media about BabyCal's vital messages.

Celebrity Spokespersons: Holly Robinson-Peete, star of the television series "For Your Love," became the spokesperson for the BabyCal Campaign in 2000 to increase public awareness about the importance of seeing a doctor early and regularly, eating right, and staying away from smoking, drinking, and drugs during pregnancy. She will be featured in a television public service announcement for BabyCal.

In addition, actress Jada Pinkett Smith ("The Nutty Professor," "Set It Off," and "A Different World") joined the BabyCal Campaign in 1999 to raise public awareness about the importance of prenatal care and practicing healthy behaviors during pregnancy.

Jada is featured in a series of BabyCal television public service announcements as well as on posters and magnets.

Toll-Free Telephone Number: BabyCal offers a toll-free telephone information service (1-800-BABY-999) that women can call to receive information about prenatal care and programs that can help expectant mothers. More than 3,700 calls to the toll-free line are received on average each month. All BabyCal Campaign communication materials market or display the toll-free number.

Is BabyCal Working?

Yes. Research conducted in three previous surveys and in 1998 has shown that BabyCal has been extremely successful in reaching pregnant women and motivating them to seek prenatal care and practice healthy behaviors during pregnancy.

The 1998 evaluation revealed that more than half of women (53 percent) remembered BabyCal messages without prompting and 95 percent recalled the messages when prompted. Exposure to the BabyCal television and radio ads led 80 percent of the respondents to change, or think about changing, their prenatal care and pregnancy-related behaviors. Finally, 30 percent reported that they started prenatal care for the first time after exposure to the BabyCal ads.

The Best News

Infant mortality is decreasing. California's infant mortality rate has fallen 27.8 percent over the past eight years. The state's improved healthy birth outcomes can be attributed, in part, to women seeking prenatal care earlier in their pregnancy.

BabyCal's Challenge

Still, 17.3 percent of all women who gave birth in California in 1998 received late (second and third trimester) or no prenatal care. This statistic is evidence of the need for continued improvements in healthy birth outcomes through perinatal education and other outreach efforts.